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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE HEBREWS.

By W. R. SCHOEMAKER,
Chicago.

WITHIN recent years this ancient gospel, often referred to and quoted by the church fathers of the third and fourth centuries, has become an object of renewed and painstaking study. This fact is due in large part to the light which the Gospel according to the Hebrews sheds upon the question of the origin and development of our canonical gospels. The similarity of the material contained in it to that of Matthew, Mark, and Luke has always been recognized; but it has been tacitly assumed, and often explicitly stated, that the writer of the Gospel according to the Hebrews had simply gathered his material out of the canonical gospels—that in this way he *compiled* a new gospel to suit his own beliefs, and to be used among people of his own theological bias.

More recent investigations have shown that this supposition does not accord with the facts. Scholars at present, therefore, are maintaining a different view, namely, that the Gospel of the Hebrews, like the canonical gospels, had its rise in the first century among the proto-gospels which were the ancestors of the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke as we know them. If this be so, this extra-canonical gospel clearly has important data to contribute toward the solution of the synoptic problem. At this time many scholars in Germany, and a few in England, are investigating the facts and bearings involved (see names and titles at the close of the article).

The Gospel according to the Hebrews does not seem to have survived beyond the fourth or fifth century. Consequently our explicit knowledge of its contents is limited to some fragments which have been preserved by reason of their being quoted in the writings of the church fathers.¹ In the so-called Apostolic

¹ These fragments may be seen in RESCH'S *Agrapha*, ROPES'S *Die Sprüche Jesu*, PREUSCHEN'S *Antilegomena*, and NESTLE'S *Novi Testamenti Graeci Supplementum*. A

Fathers (Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermas, etc.) the Gospel according to the Hebrews is not mentioned specifically by name, and quotations from it are found only once or twice, even these being somewhat doubtful. Clement of Alexandria, at the beginning of the third century, is the first writer who cites it explicitly, and he but once. Origen cites it three times, Eusebius three, Epiphanius ten, and Jerome (toward the close of the fourth century) nineteen times. Of these men Clement, Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome clearly had a copy of the gospel in their possession. It seems more likely that Epiphanius obtained his information by hearsay and from the writings of others. Hence for real evidence concerning the book we are limited to the church fathers of the third and fourth centuries, and especially to Jerome. However, Eusebius says Hegesippus used the Gospel according to the Hebrews, and gives a quotation from him. Since this evidence seems trustworthy, we have a witness for the book as early as 170 A. D. He also mentions Papias in connection with the gospel, though he does not say that Papias possessed a copy of it or quoted from it. He simply says that Papias told a story which the Gospel according to the Hebrews contains. If this evidence has any weight, we can trace the gospel back to 140 A. D. at least; but certainty is not to be had here.

The title "The Gospel according to the Hebrews" designates merely the class of readers among whom it circulated. They were Jewish Christians (or a particular sect of such) who still spoke the Aramaic language. Eusebius is the first to tell us that the Ebionites, who were the stricter sect of the Jewish Christians, maintaining that the Mosaic law was binding, not only upon them, but upon the gentile Christians as well, used this gospel. Epiphanius and Jerome confirm this evidence. Jerome, however, found it also among the Nazarenes of Syria; they were the more liberal class of Jewish Christians, who observed the law translation of them is given in NICHOLSON's *Gospel according to the Hebrews*, pp. 28-77; and elsewhere. One of the finest of these extra-canonical sayings (found in CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromata*, ii, 45, specifically attributed to the Gospel according to the Hebrews), reads: "He who wonders [in awe and with reverential faith] shall reign, and he who reigns shall rest" (*cf.* Matt. 11:28).

themselves, though they did not hold it to be required of the gentiles. Jerome was permitted by them to transcribe a copy of the gospel. Later he found another copy in the library at Cæsarea (mentioned also by Eusebius). "The Gospel according to the Hebrews" appears to have been the name applied to it by the larger Greek-speaking church. Probably the Jewish Christians themselves called it simply "the gospel," since it was the only one which they possessed.

There is a difference of opinion as to the language in which it was first composed. Some (*e. g.*, Resch) hold that it was written in the Greek and then later translated into the Hebrew; others (Hilgenfeld, Nicholson, and Handmann), that it was originally written in Aramaic and then translated into Greek. The latter view is at present held by almost all scholars, and seems decidedly the more probable.

That the gospel existed in both languages is perfectly clear, for Jerome says that he translated the Aramaic copy which he found in Syria into both Greek and Latin. And it is quite likely that even before this time it had existed in Greek, for the quotations which Clement and Origen make are most likely from a Greek translation. This earlier translation into Greek seems to have dropped into oblivion because of the increasing preference for the canonical Greek gospels; hence, by the time of Jerome the Greek form of the Gospel according to the Hebrews was practically unknown and was reproduced by him.

As to its canonicity there was also a difference of opinion. Origen classes it among the "disputed writings." Hence there must have been a large body of Jewish Christians who regarded it as their authority regarding the life, work, and teaching of Jesus. Eusebius states that some placed it among the "rejected writings." Jerome often cites it as though it were a trustworthy source. Beyond this we know very little of its status.

If now we turn to the content of the Gospel according to the Hebrews, as revealed in the fragments which have come down to us, we see at a glance that the gospel gave an account of the life, teaching, and work of Jesus, beginning with the baptism and closing with his resurrection appearances. Hence, so far as

this evidence goes, it shows a rather close parallel to our synoptic gospels. The presentation is simple, thoughtful, lifelike; for the most part it shows its primitive character by the absence of the marvelous and fantastic which adorn the apocryphal gospels. The gospel does not bear the marks of having been constructed to inculcate any particular theological tenets, except possibly in its Jewish view as to the origin and nature of Christ.

It is, in the main, a simple historical narrative whose purpose seems to have been to preserve the living, evangelical tradition for present and future use. Though following most closely the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it differs from them at many points. More than one-fourth of the material found in the thirty fragments is not found in the canonical gospels. Of the material which it has in common with them, there are eleven parallels with Matthew, twelve with Luke, and seven with Mark. The latter seven, however, are all common to both Matthew and Luke; and of those passages showing similarities to Matthew and to Luke, at least five are common to both. Hence, alongside of the element common to the synoptic tradition, this gospel contains independent coincidences with Matthew and with Luke separately, though the coincidences with Matthew are more sharply defined than those with Luke.

This shows that any theory of the origin of this gospel that would account for all the facts must explain these coincidences with Luke as well as those with Matthew. Writers on the subject have seldom been careful enough to keep this in mind. They have usually given more weight to the statements of the church fathers, as to the origin of the gospel, than to the nature of its contents. There was a strong tradition in the early church, vouched for by Papias, Irenæus, Origen, Eusebius, Epiphanius, and Jerome, that Matthew had written a gospel in the Hebrew language. Irenæus, Epiphanius, and Jerome identify the Gospel according to the Hebrews with this Hebrew gospel of Matthew, and modern writers have been inclined to make the same identification. There is no certainty about this, however; for, while Jerome is explicit enough in affirming that very many

believed them to be the same, the statements of his own belief regarding it vary so much that we are not certain what he thought. And it must also be borne in mind that Irenæus and Epiphanius had not seen the Gospel according to the Hebrews, or at least had not examined it as to its contents.

With these facts before us we are now in a position to estimate the significance of the two tendencies mentioned at the beginning of this article. The older view, which regarded this gospel as later than the canonical gospels, and as in some way compiled from them, was upheld by such great scholars as the following: Delitzsch, Ewald, Anger, Weizsäcker, Strauss, Keim, Holtzmann, and, recently, Resch. These men all laid great stress on the external evidence derived from the church fathers. Since the gospel was not mentioned by name until the third and fourth centuries, and then sometimes connected with Matthew, it seemed probable that it was a late compilation from the gospel of Matthew. The internal evidence of the gospel was largely overlooked. Since Resch is the ablest modern defender of this view, we may use him as an example. He holds that the source of this gospel was *undoubtedly* the first canonical gospel, for the Jewish Christians called it "according to Matthew," and it shows a strong Jewish-Christian tendency. He traces four stages in its historical development: (1) the Jewish Christians used only the canonical gospel of Matthew; (2) their descendants and followers—Cerinthus, Carpocrates, etc.—excised certain portions of the gospel of Matthew which contradicted their peculiar beliefs; (3) larger portions were cast aside, and wilful changes of words and phrases were made in the text; (4) still larger changes were made in the text and longer portions were added. In this way the Gospel according to the Hebrews arose. It is easy to see that this theory does full justice to what the fathers say about the gospel, but the difficulty is that it fails to account for its many close parallelisms with the gospel of Luke.

The more recent theory, that the gospel is not a compilation from the canonical Matthew, but is at least as old as, and probably older than, our synoptic gospels, is maintained by Hilgenfeld, Zahn, Nicholson, Harnack, Handmann, Krüger, McGiffert,

Ropes, and others. These men lay great stress on the internal evidence of the gospel, and by this means are able to show quite conclusively that it was in existence long before the limited external evidence gives any clear indication of the fact. Hilgenfeld, who was the first consistent champion of this view, holds that the Hebrew gospel of Matthew mentioned by Papias was just this Gospel according to the Hebrews. At first our extracanonical gospel went by the name "according to Matthew," but later, because it was the only gospel of the Jewish Christians, it came to be called "according to the Hebrews." This gospel was continually undergoing change. New recensions were put forth from time to time. It was early translated into Greek, and in that form came into the hands of Clement and Origen. The views of Zahn and McGiffert are practically the same as those of Hilgenfeld. Nicholson supposes that the writer of the canonical Matthew was also, probably at a different time, the author of the Gospel according to the Hebrews—or at least of that portion of the latter which runs parallel to the former. Harnack holds that the Gospel according to the Hebrews can neither have been the model (*Vorlage*) nor the translation of the canonical Matthew, but a work independent of this, though drawing from the same sources; perhaps it represented to some extent an earlier stage of the evangelic tradition.

Handmann, who has gone to the extreme length of this tendency, maintains that the close parallelism of the gospel with Luke as well as with Matthew shows that it must be related to both; the contents are parallel to Matthew and then to Luke in such a way that it is impossible to establish any rule for the vacillation. Further, if we also take into consideration the matter peculiar to this gospel, Handmann thinks it quite clear that the Gospel according to the Hebrews in its earliest form contained a tradition independent of both Matthew and Luke, and probably represented a primitive stage of the collected evangelic narrative. Then it constituted one of the primary sources of the final gospels, and was afterward incorporated into the canonical Matthew and Luke. He infers, therefore, that the Gospel according to the Hebrews was nothing other than the

Aramaic *Logia* of Matthew (so called by Papias), and, in conjunction with the original Mark, made up the two chief sources for the first and third canonical gospels. Of these two primitive documents he regards the Aramaic *Logia* (*i. e.*, also in his opinion the Gospel according to the Hebrews in its first form) as the earlier. He asks, if the *Logia* of Matthew contained narrative material as well as sayings of Jesus, may it not have been exactly the Gospel according to the Hebrews? Handmann thus sums up the results of his painstaking investigation.

The purpose here is not to defend the individual opinion of any one of these scholars, but to call attention to the common ground occupied by them all. So far they agree: that this gospel is at least as old as, and probably older than, the synoptic gospels of our canon; that it issued from the common early gospel tradition, and so may be a source of, or at least a concomitant of, our canonical Matthew and Luke. Nor is this the only one of the extra-canonical or "apocryphal" gospels which can with likelihood be dated as coming from that first period of the transmission of the evangelic narrative. Harnack seems to have shown quite conclusively that the Gospel according to the Egyptians is a similar production, though in this case we are unfortunate in possessing so few quotations from it. If, as Harnack maintains, the Oxyrhynchus "logia," or sayings of Jesus, recently discovered, were extracts from this gospel, our knowledge of its contents is somewhat increased. In these two gospels then, and probably also in others, we have a new source of information toward the solution of the difficult question of gospel origins. If this be so, it is only another witness to the statement, put forth by Luke in the preface to his gospel, that many had taken in hand to draw up a gospel narrative. It shows how numerous were the attempts to write a gospel history, and how many differences of form and content distinguished these several attempts from each other. It was as successors to such primitive documents, as well as out of such primitive documents as sources, that our canonical gospels arose. Then, because of their greater completeness, their higher historical value, and their better literary quality—in short,

because of their intrinsic worth and purity—they steadily surpassed all earlier and competing gospels, driving them from the field, and winning their way to absolute recognition and use in the church.

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